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ABSTRACT

This Kids Count report of the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth reviews the role of schools, bullying, media, family violence, gangs, and substance use in the violence experienced by children and young people in Virginia and the United States. The report finds that increasing numbers of young people experience violent images and messages in the media or are either witnesses to, offenders in, or victims of violence. Key risk factors are identified that increase the likelihood of violence among young people: peer pressure; need for attention or respect; feelings of low self-worth or feeling isolated or rejected; early childhood abuse or neglect; witnessing violence at home, in the community, or in the media; and easy access to weapons. Violence is seen as a learned but not an inevitable response to anger or lack of control. The report also finds that effective early prevention programs targeting younger children focus on multiple factors associated with youth violence, are oriented to the family, and involve long-term efforts. A number of factors are highlighted that lessen the likelihood of violence, including early care and education and after-school care; strong and supportive adults in family, school, and community; parental monitoring of media in the home; and restricted availability of weapons. (DLH)

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SPECIAL REPORT

AN OVERVIEW: CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE

L. Wood

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Action Alliance

for Virginia's Children & Youth

kids count in Virginia

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The prevention or reduction of violence as it affects the lives of young people is a priority focus for the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth. In researching and compiling this paper, we were struck by the complexity of the topic—in terms of likely causes and possible solutions. This special report is part of the Action Alliance's effort to address this important issue.

Produced by the Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth
Lisa Wood, director of kids count
Suzanne Clark Johnson, executive director

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation
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Freddie Mac Foundation
The Arlington County Medical Society Alliance
(in memory of those lost at Columbine High School and in honor of the students, teachers, and families left behind)

The Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth is the statewide, multiple-issue child advocacy organization. For information about membership, KIDS COUNT in Virginia, or any of the Action Alliance's other activities and projects, please contact:

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Consider the following:

- *Nearly 13 children die each day from gunfire in America.*[1]
- *Teenagers are two-and-a-half times more likely than adults to be victims of violence.*[2]
- *Every 4 ½ hours in Virginia, a juvenile is arrested for a violent crime.*[3]
- *Individuals who experience an initial trauma before the age of 11 are three times more likely to develop psychiatric symptoms than those who experience their first trauma as teens.*[4]
- *Approximately 275 Virginia youth are hospitalized for assaults each year, with an average cost of $10,400 per hospitalization.*[5]
- *Chronic exposure to violence can have serious developmental consequences for children.*[6,7] *It can also lead to substance abuse, delinquency, adult criminality, and emotional problems.*[8]
- *Children and youth ages 12-17 are nearly three times as likely as adults to be victims of violent crime.*[9]
- *Youth crime peaks between 3:00 pm and 7:00 pm; millions of children and youth are unsupervised during those hours.*[10]
- *Between 1979 and 1996, almost 20,000 more American children were killed by firearms than all those who died in combat in Vietnam. Also between 1979 and 1996, about 225,000 more American children and teens were wounded by firearms than American soldiers were wounded in combat in Vietnam.*[11]
- *Preventing one youth from leaving school and turning to a life of crime and drugs saves society approximately $2 million.*[12]

Children need to feel safe.

However, the US is the most violent country in the industrialized world, having the highest numbers of homicides, rapes, and assaults. The problem of violence–"the exertion of any force so as to injure or abuse"[13]–is not restricted to any one group or area. All children today are affected by the violence that spreads throughout the nation, the Commonwealth, our communities, and our homes. Violence threatens the healthy development of children.

Some children experience violence more directly than others, but every child feels the effects of violence. Exposure ranges from encountering strong images and messages in the media to being a direct witness, victim, or perpetrator.

Although violence and its symbols are pervasive in our culture, violence is not inevitable. It is a learned behavior in response to stress.

Preventing acts of violence and maintaining a safe and secure environment for children is a major responsibility and obligation of society.

Is violence really an epidemic among young people today, or is there just increased attention and media coverage regarding the issue? Do certain characteristics or behaviors predict whether or not a child will commit one or more violent acts? Is there a gene for violence?

> ***"Youth violence is very widespread in our society. It is not just a problem for the poor, or minorities, or those in large cities. It crosses all class, race, gender, and residence boundaries. It is a problem for all Americans."***[14]

Youth violence takes many forms.

It ranges from aggressive verbal assaults to physical harm to death.

Each violent event is a chance occurrence, in the sense that no human characteristic, set of circumstances, or chain of events makes violence inevitable.

The victim or the perpetrator (or both) may be a young person. Outcomes, severity, and causal factors may differ. Not all children respond to difficult situations in the same way. Figuring prominently in youth violence are the perpetrator's age and developmental level, temperament, community environment, family dynamics, and social and learning experiences. There is no single reason or cause for violent behaviors.

Young people who commit violent offenses often have many simultaneously-existing problems in their lives. The presence of these problems—or risk factors—does not cause violence to occur; it just increases the likelihood that violence will result. Some key risk factors for violence have been identified:[14]

- peer pressure
- need for attention or respect
- feelings of low self-worth; feeling isolated or rejected
- early childhood abuse or neglect
- witnessing violence at home, in the community, or in the media
- easy access to weapons

"Although many believe that violence is the direct, inevitable result of extreme anger or inadequate impulse control, research suggests that [these] put an individual at risk for violence only if violent acts are that person's preferred response learned through past experiences."[b]

Most violent behavior is learned behavior. We all have some potential for violent behavior; we have observed others using violence and know how to do it. "Like money and knowledge, violence is a form of power, and for some youth, it is the only form of power available."[15]

At an early age, children often learn aggression is an effective way to deal with conflict. According to research, it is possible to predict from an eight-year-old's aggressive behavior in school how aggressive that child will be in adolescence and adulthood—including whether he or she will exhibit criminal and antisocial behavior.[16]

The earlier a child begins to commit violent offenses, the greater likelihood he or she will continue to do so. Studies have found that about 50% of children who begin committing violent offenses before the age of nine become chronic violent offenders during adolescence, compared with about 40% who begin committing violent offenses between the ages of 10 and 12, and 23% who began at age 13 or older.[17]

"Road rage begins with tricycle rage and Hot Wheels rage."[c]

Younger juveniles account for a substantial proportion of juvenile arrests and the juvenile court caseload. In the US, about one-third of juveniles arrested in 1997 were under the age of 15. The most common reasons for these juvenile arrests were arson, sex offenses, vandalism, and larceny-theft. It has been shown that less serious problem behaviors precede more serious delinquency. Teenagers who end up in court for serious offenses typically began to have problems at the age of 7.[18] As noted youth violence expert James Garbarino says, "violent teens are likely to have been aggressive kids."[19]

Research indicates that juvenile violence prevention programs that target older children are not as successful as programs that target younger children and their

"Rather than waiting until violence has been learned and practiced and then devoting increased resources to hiring policemen, building more prisons, and sentencing three-time offenders to life imprisonment, it would be more effective to redirect the resources to early violence prevention programs, particularly for young children and adolescents." [4]

families. These early intervention programs have some characteristics in common: they focus on multiple factors associated with youth violence; they are family-oriented; and they involve long-term efforts, often lasting years.[20]

There is evidence that a good relationship with a parent, marked by warmth and the absence of severe criticism, can have a substantial protective, or "buffering," effect against the development of later antisocial behavior. Evidence from many studies suggests that hostile or rejecting parenting and lack of parental supervision are associated with children's subsequent antisocial behavior and delinquency.[21]

Much research points to the benefits of early childhood education in reducing or preventing later violent behaviors. A review of seven major studies showed that adolescents who had received early childhood education, when compared to those who had not, had lower rates of delinquency, higher rates of high school graduation, and higher rates of sustained employment.[22] Other studies show that preschool education "strengthens children's bonds to schooling." It leads to improved classroom conduct and improved personal behavior as rated by elementary school teachers; children who have had preschool education also show a reduced frequency of being kept after class and a decrease in teenage delinquent behavior.[23] And, other research indicates preschool's "lasting beneficial effects" in decreasing delinquency and crime, even in the long term. At the age of 19, those who had had preschool education had fewer self-reports of involvement with the police, in gangs, in serious fights, or in causing someone an injury that "required bandages or a doctor."[24]

"America's fight against violence must begin in the high chair, not the electric chair. Anything less leaves America's police fighting with one hand tied behind our backs."
- George Sweat, chief of police, Winston-Salem, NC

Factors regularly associated with chronic delinquency include a history of antisocial behavior in childhood (such as frequent fighting, hitting, stealing, vandalism, or lying), perinatal difficulties, neurological and biological factors, low school achievement, low IQ, low verbal ability, neighborhoods characterized by social disorganization and violence, parental criminality and substance abuse, inconsistent and/or harsh parenting practices, low socioeconomic status, and exposure to media violence.[25]

"We've seen enough to know that there will be a booming business in yellow crime scene tape and caskets for innocent people until government's investments in prisons and police are matched by front-end investments for children."
- Edward Flynn, chief of police, Arlington, VA

Living in violent environments creates an "extra energy drain" for a child, and he or she must be "hypervigilant." The avoidance of risk becomes so extreme it leads to a diminished sense of achievement and mastery.[26] For instance, a child who is fearful in her neighborhood will be less inclined to go outside and play; her fear immobilizes her. Her sense of exploration is suppressed, and her comprehensive development is impaired.

"When a child has received the services he or she needs, there may be a store that isn't robbed, an elderly woman who isn't held up at gunpoint, or a police officer who doesn't lose his life enforcing the law."
- Melvin Wearing, chief of police, New Haven, CT

Schools

Schools have often been regarded as "safe havens" for students; however, a 1999 Gallup poll found that 47% of American parents fear for their children's safety at school. (This may be due in large part to the recent rampages of violence at our nation's schools.) A 1998 study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that about 21% of high schools, 19% of middle schools, and 4% of elementary schools have at least one serious violent crime per year.

But, schools may indeed be one of the safest places for young people, in terms of fatalities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fewer than 1% of all homicides among school-aged children occur in or around school grounds or on the way to and from school. To put this issue into perspective, the Justice Policy Institute reports that the number of children killed by gun violence in schools is about half the number of Americans killed annually as a result of being struck by lightning.

School violence is a community problem that happened to get through the schoolhouse door.[e]

Traditionally, schools have relied on various disciplinary measures to correct behavior problems among students. School discipline reports provide other useful information on school violence. For the 1996-97 school year, Virginia had nearly 102 school suspensions per 1,000 students, and an average of 164 fights per day took place in Virginia schools.[27] Virginia data on school violence indicate that physical fighting peaks during the upper middle school years.[28]

A 1998 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that about 1 in 5 teenagers carries a gun, knife, or club every day—before, during, or after school. In Virginia, statistics indicate that weapon incidents peak in public schools in grades 7-9.[f]

Children deserve to feel secure and out of harm's way in schools. When children's energies are directed toward defending themselves or addressing their fears, they have difficulty learning in school. Researchers found that many children who faced life-threatening situations or who witnessed injuries to others had serious difficulty in concentrating and performing in school[29] and that children who experienced violent events "during their first six years of life could not learn in a normal classroom situation. The recurring threats in these children's environment may constitute a 'lifelong expectation of aggression, violence, exclusion, derogation, and defeat' for them."[30]

When dealing with violence, some school-based strategies seem to "turn the tide" effectively. Schools have had success with forms of mediation in dealing with student conflicts. A project that involved fifth graders—many of whom had behavior problems—serving as mediators in aggressive playground incidents was responsible for a more than 50% reduction in such occurrences.[31] Research shows that first grade teachers are one of the more powerful determinants for later violence; if they are not viewed as effective by the child, he or she is 20 times more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors by the seventh grade.[32]

Bullies see the world with a paranoid's eye. They see threats where none exist, and they take these imagined threats as provocations to strike back. They are—by the age of 7 or 8—already in the habit of misinterpreting an innocent brush or bump as a blatant attack.[g]

Bullying

Bullying is defined as peer abuse in school. It encompasses a continuum of behaviors—from the physical acts of hair pulling, biting, and hitting; to the verbal acts of teasing and name calling; to the emotional acts of humiliating and extorting; to the sexual acts of exhibitionism, harassment, and abuse. While active and assertive play is a normal part of childhood, bullies are characterized by their quickness to start a fight, belligerence, use of force and intimidation, little empathy for others, overt aggression, destructive tendencies, and enjoyment of dominating other children.[33]

A 1993 survey found that 20% of suburban students recommend shooting someone "who has stolen something from you," while 8% believe it is acceptable to shoot a person "who has done something to offend or insult you."[h]

Studies have found that bullying in early childhood may predict the development of violent tendencies, delinquency, and criminality.[34] Bullying tends to increase in middle school—it may be used as a strategy to establish dominance in new peer groups as the students enter a new and bigger school.[35] Young bullies have about a 1-in-4 chance of having a criminal record by the time they are 30; other children have about a 1-in-20 chance of becoming adult criminals.[36]

A sampling of gun-related accidents that occurred in Virginia in 1996:

•Thinking she heard fireworks, a Norfolk 3-year-old was killed by gunfire when she raised the blind of her second-story bedroom window.

•A 10-year-old in Lexington was accidentally shot and killed at a shooting range by an instructor with 16 years' experience.

•In Portsmouth, a 7-year-old, hearing gunfire, hid in the bathroom. Upon emerging, she was shot and killed in crossfire.

•A Richmond 15-year-old was shot and killed when a handgun—that he and two friends found in a van—was fired accidentally.

-Information supplied by Virginians Against Handgun Violence

Guns

The ready availability of guns has broadened the scope and severity of violence among youth. Research suggests that one reason for more violent juvenile crime is that juveniles have access to more sophisticated, more lethal weaponry. The "codes of conduct" that applied years ago—that told youth when to walk away, when to talk it out, and when to fight—no longer govern. In the past, conflicts were resolved in violent, but non-deadly ways. Because juveniles now have more access to guns, and the street rules have changed, youth today are likely to resolve their disputes in "more lethal ways."[37] Research shows that "handguns are more likely to be owned by socially deviant youth than by their more socially adjusted peers, even in those sections of the country in which firearms and hunting are fairly common."[38] The violent use of guns is not limited to conflicts with others; the Children's Defense Fund reports that guns are the most common method of suicide for children.

Carrying a gun "for protection" does not eliminate the risk of being a victim of gunfire. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveyed children who had been shot; 35% of the victims were carrying guns when they themselves were shot.

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that 1.2 million latchkey children have access to guns when they come home from school. The *New England Journal of Medicine* states that "the presence of a gun in a home increases the likelihood of homicide in that home almost threefold and of suicide fivefold."

Gunshot wounds—as well as other outcomes of violence—do not always result in fatalities; an injury that does not result in death is defined as an assault. Nationally, the non-fatal assault rate has risen more than 730% in the past 40 years.[39] According to the Virginia Department of Health, about 275 Virginia youth are hospitalized for non-fatal assaults each year, at an average cost of $10,400 per hospitalization.

In a 1999 Gallup poll, 61% of voters said that the April 1999 school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, were due to a lack of gun control laws that keep guns out of children's hands.

What about children who are "too young" to carry guns? According to a recent *Harper's Index*, Americans spend more than $100 million on toy guns every year. Do these toys encourage violent behavior? Experiments examining the short-term effects of playing with aggressive toys indicate that youngsters are far more apt to become aggressively stimulated for a time afterward, than to become "more peaceful and cooperative." Studies about long-term effects suggest that rehearsing and reinforcing these "scripts for behavior" firmly entrenches them, and they are then likely to be "generalized to realistic situations."[40]

Media

For the last 20 years, there has been one overriding finding: the mass media are significant contributors to the aggressive behavior and aggression-related attitudes of many children, adolescents, and adults.[41]

Our society's heavy involvement with the media is often linked to violence. Whether from television, movies, music videos, video games, or the Internet, most experts agree that a child's frequent exposure can lead to a desensitization of mass media violence.[41] "Viewing violence in the media can lead to increased violence toward others, increased fearfulness about becoming a victim of violence, increased callousness toward violence among others, and increased self-initiated behavior that exposes one to further risk

of violence."[42] A primary complaint about media violence is that it rarely depicts the harmful and lasting consequences of real-life violence.

Few researchers bother any longer to dispute that bloodshed on TV and in the movies has an effect on kids who witness it.

- Time magazine[i]

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the critical period of exposure to media violence is preadolescent childhood.

Youth who recently testified before the American Psychological Association Task Force outlined what they perceive as major influences in the media: the mere presence of violence, the lack of nonviolent role models, the constant imaging of a society in which "the good life" can—and must—be attained, and the media portrayal of aggression as a means to solve conflict.

Television is much different today than it was a decade or so ago. Today, about 98% of American households have television.[43] Within these homes, the television is on about 28 hours per week for children 2-11, and 23 hours per week for teenagers. Among children, television viewing occupies more time than any other non-school activity and accounts for more than one-half of leisure time activity.[44]

By the age of 18, the average child will have seen 40,000 killings and 200,000 acts of violence on television.

- American Medical Association[ii]

Recent studies indicate that children with VCR (video cassette recorder) or cable access have seen "more R-rated films than their non-cable, non-VCR counterparts. The fact [is] that many of these films would not be shown on commercial television, or if they were, much of the violence and sex would be cut."[45]

Television increases its "viewers' potential for perpetrating violence," and it often leads to behavioral and psychological indifference to violence against others, growing mistrust of others, an increased "mean world" view, and an exaggerated view of both the prevalence and appropriateness of violence in the real world.[46]

More than 60% of men portrayed on American television are involved in violence.[47] Unfortunately, this number includes the "good guys" who are idolized by children; many of these heroes "do good" through violent action, which reinforces violence's role in day-to-day activities.

The American Medical Association found that nearly one-third of male felons imprisoned for committing violent crimes reported to have "consciously imitated crime techniques learned from television programs." They also hypothesize that "if television technology had never been developed, there would today be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the [US], 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults."[48]

"For kids already at risk for aggressive behaviors, [playing violent video games] is like adding gasoline to the fire."

Cartoons often are thought of as innocuous, and not depicting "real" violence. According to the National Coalition on Television Violence, Saturday morning network programming featured 20 violent acts per hour in 1989-90. In a 1991 national survey, 91% of responding teachers reported increased violence among children in their classrooms as a result of "cross-media marketing of violent cartoons, toys, videos, and other licensed products."[49]

Video games "can increase aggression in children, make them more fearful

and less trusting, and desensitize them to violent behavior by other people," according to the National TV Violence Study. Some experts believe that certain types of violent video games, which "arm the player with simulated weapons as he blasts his way from one dungeon-like chamber to another, killing as many cyber villains as he can, may be as effective in training killers as flight simulators are in training pilots."[50]

In a recent study, 357 seventh- and eighth-grade students were asked to identify their preference among five categories of video games: about 32% selected games that involved fantasy violence; almost 30% preferred sports games (many of which contain violent sub-themes); 20% expressed a preference for general entertainment themes; 17% favored games that involved human violence; and fewer than 2% chose games with an educational content.[51]

Harsh and continual physical punishment by parents has been implicated in the development of aggressive behavior patterns."

Interactive video games have been called "the 1990s version of cops and robbers." In these games, players score points by shooting with guns. A nine-year-old boy described the excitement of "going for the kill" in a game of laser tag: "We all tried to kill each other. . . . We went on a rampage the last ten seconds or so and killed anything we could find."[52]

Family Violence

Exposure to multiple forms of violence at home—including domestic violence, child abuse, and a general family climate of hostility—doubles the risk of self-reported youth violence.[53] It has been found that a history of child maltreatment increases the chances of juvenile arrest by 53%.[54] Children of all ages are affected by domestic violence and by child abuse. Infants exposed to violence may not develop the attachments to their caretaker(s) that are critical to their development; they may suffer from "failure to thrive." Preschool children in violent homes may regress developmentally and suffer sleep disturbances. School-age children may exhibit a range of problem behaviors, including depression, anxiety, and violence toward peers.[55]

A comparison of delinquent and non-delinquent youth found that a history of family violence or abuse is the most significant difference between the two groups."

A child who has seen violence at home does not always become violent, but he or she may be more likely to try to resolve conflicts with threats, intimidation, and violence. Research shows that males who witnessed spousal abuse as children are significantly more likely to use violent behavior than non-witnesses.[56] Studies have found that child witnesses of family violence—compared to non-witnesses—exhibit more aggressive, antisocial, anxious, depressive, and fearful behaviors, and that they show lower autonomy, social competence, verbal skills, cognitive development, empathy, self-esteem, and motor abilities.[57]

Gangs

Feeling rejected—by peers, by family, or by the community—is a characteristic that is common to youth who commit violent offenses. A desire to overcome this feeling and to "belong" is often cited as a reason for the popularity of youth joining gangs. "Youth are motivated to join gangs to meet the same developmental needs that all youth are seeking—a sense of

connection, belonging, and self-definition."[58] Gang involvement is prevalent in our country and in the Commonwealth: Virginia reported as much as a 200% increase in youth gang activity in the Commonwealth between 1994 and 1996.[59]

Gang demographics changed beginning in the 1980s. "Delinquent gangs are no longer confined to certain states and to the inner city; and their membership encompasses a wider range, with members as young as 9."[60] Two Virginia-specific facts support this statement: youth gangs have been identified in all regions of the Commonwealth, and nearly 60% of Virginia youth gang members in detention centers reported joining their gangs by the age of 13.[61]

Young adolescents who initiate substance use early and engage in it frequently are more likely to carry guns and other weapons.[o]

Substance Use

The use of alcohol and drugs has been linked to the occurrence of violence. It can impair judgement, reaction time, and inhibitions, which can lead to conflict or violence. It can shape an encounter so that the outcome is different than if one or both parties were sober. The context in which drinking or drug use occurs has independent effects on how events will unfold—and if they will be violent or not. Research has shown that being intoxicated increases the likelihood that a person's language will become "provocative and boastful," often turning minor disputes into violent encounters. Substance use can also exaggerate the "sense of outrage over perceived transgressions of personal codes," which can result in violence to either "exert control or exact retribution."[62]

More than one-half of juvenile offenders incarcerated in Virginia have previous substance abuse problems.[p]

The presence of mental illness can be a predisposing factor for violent behavior. However, the diagnosed mental illness most associated with violence is substance abuse. Research indicates that, of the violent individuals diagnosed, 25% were alcohol abusers and 35% were drug abusers.[63]

One solution to reducing or preventing violence in our society is to incarcerate violent offenders after they have committed a violent act. Young offenders are not always committed to the juvenile correctional system. Children and youth held in adult jails are at serious risk of assault and abuse. Compared to juveniles in juvenile facilities, youth housed in adult prisons are eight times more likely to commit suicide, five times more likely to be sexually assaulted, two times more likely to be assaulted by staff, and 50% more likely to be attacked with a weapon.[64]

More than 2,500 Virginia juveniles are incarcerated. Only six states put a larger percentage of young people in juvenile prisons or jails than Virginia, although the Commonwealth's juvenile crime rate is below the national average.[q]

The criminal justice system cannot be our primary response to violence. Although the criminal courts are an important part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce violence, they are an act of intervention, rather than prevention. Merely punishing violent offenders is reactive; it does not fully prevent or reduce further violent behavior.[65]

"Unless we are prepared to invest resources in the early years—the playpen—through prevention, we are necessarily going to have to invest significantly more resources in state pens."
- Robert E. Shepherd, Jr.[r]

It is true that some children seem to be immune to succumbing to violent behaviors. Research suggests that a child's resilience can counter the negative effects of violence. Whether this resilience is internal—such as temperament or coping mechanisms—or external—such as organized community programs; high quality schools; committed school personnel;

mentors and role models; economic opportunity; adult family members who are nurturing, caring, and responsible; and consistent, structured supervision at home[66]—it plays an important role in determining whether or not a child will display violence.

"We can make ourselves and our children safer by investing in child care and after-school programs for America's most vulnerable kids, instead of waiting to spend far more—in money and lives—on those who become America's 'Most Wanted' adults."

- R.G. Kerlikowske, police commissioner, Buffalo, NY

Increasing numbers of young people are involved in violent activities—either as the offender or as the victim. Early warning signs for later violent behavior cannot be dismissed. Everyone who comes into contact with a youth—parents, educators, child care providers, clergy, health care providers—has the potential, one way or another, to affect a child's involvement with risk factors that lead to violent actions.

Just as there is no single cause for violent behaviors, there is no single "quick fix." Some might support getting tougher with offenders. Instilling strong morals might be another option. And, still others might say the solution is to attack violence at its roots through a variety of efforts—such as parental training, early education, social and economic supports, and nonviolent conflict resolution. Taken alone, each solution is too simplistic. Taken together, these options make a strong program for stemming youth violence.[67]

A comprehensive, integrated approach is necessary to more effectively reduce violence. Some factors have been shown to lessen the likelihood of violence, including early care and education and after-school care; strong and supportive adults in family, schools, and the community; parental monitoring of media in the home; and restricted availability to weaponry.

As concerned Virginians, we must advocate for public policies and actions to reduce violence and its causes. We must focus energy and resources on prevention, rather than intervention. A generation is at risk.

Endnotes

(Numbered references appear first; those indicated with lower-case letters appear after the numbers.)

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Quote on back cover from Garbarino J, *et al.* (1992.) *Children in danger: Coping with the effects of community violence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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A child's life is not fixed in some unalterable genetic code that predetermines what and who he or she will be. Each child contains the potential to be many different children, and caring adults can help to determine which of those children will come to life.

- James Garbarino

kids count in Virginia

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